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ABSTRACT

Several qualitative studies in biliteracy (a term used to describe children's literate competencies in two languages) among students in English/Spanish bilingual elementary school classrooms have as their core thesis the notion that children, from both Latina/o and other student populations, have the potential to develop literacy in two languages and that these literacies can develop within classroom settings. Little research has been conducted on biliteracy in classroom settings. Even in the field of literacy research, where attention to how different "literacies" are related to social contexts and cultural practices has become a prominent feature of study, the topic of biliteracy has not received much, if any, attention. The study of biliteracy provides a different perspective through which educators may understand Latina/o students in bilingual settings. One of the most significant findings from the qualitative studies (conducted between 1989 and 1996 in the Tucson, Arizona area) was that children's biliteracy development can be attained with deliberate support in classroom settings. Findings also suggest that there are multiple paths to children's biliteracy development; it was the bilingual students who were more equipped to fully participate in activities than their monolingual English peers; there must be a sufficiently viable community of Spanish-speakers as a part of the broader sociolinguistic environment to support classroom biliteracy; teachers who brought a dynamic, holistic philosophy and practice to their classrooms facilitated biliteracy; and biliteracy development may be enhanced by certain combinations of student characteristics. Although more research is needed, biliteracy development holds promise for initiating and sustaining truly "additive bilingualism" in schools. (Contains 38 references.) (RS)

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Biliteracy development: Perspectives from research in children's reading and writing

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Introduction

The topic of children's biliteracy has received relatively little attention from researchers, despite its obvious relevance to areas such as bilingual education, literacy research, and minority students. Biliteracy is a term used to describe children's literate competencies in two languages, to whatever degree, developed either simultaneously or successively. While there have been a number of studies of children's literacy within bilingual contexts, most have focused on either reading or writing, and in most cases, they focus on the process of transfer from a native language to English literacy. This is not surprising, given that the overall goal of most bilingual education programs is development English proficiency. More significantly, few of these have attempted to understand biliteracy as a special form of literacy, one that must be examined through a bilingual, rather than a monolingual, perspective.

This presentation will discuss key perspectives from several recent qualitative studies in biliteracy among students in English/Spanish bilingual elementary school classrooms. At the core of these studies is the thesis that children, from both Latina/o and other student populations, have the potential to develop literacy in two languages and that these literacies can develop within classroom settings. In other words, literacy development in English and Spanish is possible within classroom contexts with appropriate instructional support. This has important implications for research and pedagogy in both bilingual and monolingual English school settings.

The Importance of the Study of Biliteracy

There has been relatively little research on biliteracy in classroom settings. Although one might expect to find research on biliteracy in areas such as bilingual education or second language learning, a review of the literature in these areas indicates that this is not the case. Ironically, even in the field of literacy research, where attention to how different "literacies" are related to social contexts and cultural practices has become a prominent feature of study (see, e.g., John-Steiner, Panofsky & Smith, 1994; Scribner & Cole, 1981), the topic of biliteracy has not received much, if any, attention (but see, Ferdman, Weber, & Ramírez, 1994; Moll & Dworin, 1996; Walsh, 1994). This neglect is the case even though bilingualism is such a common world-wide phenomenon and obviously relevant to the study of how literacy is constituted in different contexts.

Similarly, most of the studies in bilingual education are concerned with instructional features, assessing the effectiveness of bilingual programs, or whether students develop spoken proficiency in English as a second language. Second language acquisition studies tend to focus on reading or writing in students' most recently acquired language (which is almost always English), but do not consider the study of literacy development in two languages. The same situation even holds for the study of bilingualism, a field which has tended to ignore the study of literacy. As Valdés (1991, p. 5) has noted, "In general, the research on bilingualism has concerned itself primarily with the study of the spoken language. Most studies have focused on bilingualism as opposed to biliteracy." A few notable exceptions include studies by Fishman (1980), Flores (1982), Goodman, Goodman, & Flores (1979), and Hornberger (1989), Walsh (1991), and

Whitmore & Crowell (1994), among others, whose work has influenced these studies in biliteracy.

One of the most significant implications of biliteracy lies with its potential intellectual consequences, where students establish mediated relationships between symbol systems and the social world to create knowledge and transform it for meaningful purposes. Students' biliterate abilities, therefore, represent key linguistic and cultural tools that may greatly assist their intellectual development in ways not readily available in monolingual English classrooms. Unlike monolinguals, these children can transact with two literate worlds, thus amplifying their resources for thinking and learning (Moll & Dworin, 1996).

There is also the relatively unexplored area of the cognitive consequences of biliteracy. Studies by Díaz (1983), among others, (see Bild & Swain, 1989; Díaz & Klinger, 1991; Hakuta & Díaz, 1985; Malakoff & Hakuta, 1991; Reynolds, 1991), suggest that there are differences in cognitive processes between monolingual and bilingual students, and that bilinguals may have significant cognitive advantages over monolinguals. Although there has been considerable research done in this area, (see e.g., Bialystok, 1991) less work has been done on biliteracy per se and the cognitive advantages that may result, especially from its use in classrooms.

Significantly, the study of biliteracy provides a different perspective through which we may understand Latina/o students in bilingual settings, who come primarily from working-class backgrounds (Moll, 1988). It is the bilingual and Spanish-speaking children's abilities that position them to potentially play central intellectual and social roles in classrooms where Spanish and bilingualism are necessary, valuable tools for

academic pursuits. Thus, instead of the persistent and common deficit views (that equate lack of knowledge of English with not being "ready" to learn) being operative, Latina/o students are regarded as capable participants who bring crucial intellectual and linguistic resources to their classrooms (Dworin, 1998; Moll & Dworin, 1996).

Biliteracy is an important component for the development of a culturally relevant pedagogy for Latina/o children. Biliterate students are able to access a broader range of cultural resources in two languages, including (but not limited to) library resources, mass media, the internet, the many forms of popular print, as well as other Spanish or English speaking children and adults who reside outside of their immediate area. Their worlds, then, expand to include not only the U. S., but also Latin America and other Spanish speaking peoples, thus linking them intellectually within a legacy of Spanish discourses and literacies. This type of approach could easily mediate inumerable classroom projects that promote culturally relevant teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Moll, et al. 1990a) precisely because students' biliteracy and bilingualism are the vital tools of inquiry within these cultural contexts. Teachers could also promote similar objectives through classroom studies within their local communities as well; these activities could utilize students' cultural backgrounds in different, yet, perhaps, even more significant ways for their students (Moll, Tapia & Whitmore, 1993). In short, biliteracy might be fully utilized for academic purposes that expand learning possibilities by building upon the language and culture that these students bring to their classrooms.

Finally, there is potential for "language majority" (monolingual English or Anglophone) students to become biliterate within school contexts. Biliteracy for these children is perhaps more complicated, in terms of providing sufficient support for it

within and outside of classrooms, given the hegemony of English in U.S. society (Shannon, 1995; Walsh, 1991) and that elective bilingualism is predominantly an individual, rather than a group process (Valdés & Figueroa, 1994). Biliteracy development for Anglophone students is possible, however, and does occur within bilingual settings (Dworin, 1996; Whitmore & Crowell, 1994); however, there has been relatively little research attention given to this topic, especially within the qualitative research traditions. In general, then, further research is needed in all of the areas outlined above to advance an understanding of the potential intellectual, cognitive, and cultural consequences of biliteracy in classroom settings.

Overview of the Studies

Between 1989 and 1996, there were several longitudinal research projects that addressed issues related to English-Spanish biliteracy and schooling in Tucson, Arizona. Several key insights into biliteracy in classroom settings come from the following three of studies: 1) The Community Literacy Project (Moll, et al. 1990a; Moll, et al. 1990b; Whitmore & Crowell, 1994); 2) The Biliteracy Project (Moll & Dworin, 1993, 1996); and 3) A one-year, dissertation study on biliteracy among second and third grade students (Dworin, 1996, 1998). Briefly stated, each of the three studies examined children's biliteracy in classroom contexts utilizing qualitative methods (participant observation, interviews with teachers and students, collection and analysis of reading and writing samples, etc.) and guided by the assumption that biliteracy represents an important intellectual and social tool for students, teachers, and others.

Given that English-Spanish bilingualism is relatively common in the region, it is not surprising that in two of the studies (Community Literacy Project & Biliteracy

Project), we found that biliteracy among bilingual children occured without formal instruction. It appears, however, that children's Spanish literacy may not achieve similar levels to English literacy without deliberate instruction (Moll & Dworin, 1996). This is, of course, related to the remedial nature of most bilingual programs, where the primary goals are the development of English language proficiency and the mainstreaming of students into all-English instruction.

One of the most significant findings from these studies is that children's biliteracy development can be attained with deliberate support in classroom settings (Dworin, 1996; Whitmore & Crowell, 1994). This raises some important issues regarding what we often describe as "bilingual education," not the least of which is the promotion of Spanish literacy as a valuable intellectual tool rather than simply a means to English proficiency. That is, under certain circumstances, children may choose to begin to use literacy in their less developed language because "authentic" purposes make that a necessity, as in the case of Anglophone students in English-Spanish bilingual classrooms who want to communicate with their Spanish-reading/writing peers, who often make up the majority of children in the classroom. In addition, these studies of biliteracy in classrooms suggest that our understanding of the process of "transfer"may need to be expanded to include the transfer of knowledge and abilities from the less developed language to the stronger one (Cummins, 1989: Dworin, 1996; Moll & Dworin, 1996).

Multiple paths to biliteracy

Findings from these biliteracy studies suggest that there are multiple paths to children's biliteracy development. Similar to findings from the work of Edelsky (1986; see also, 1989), these studies found some common beliefs about literacy learning in bilingual

contexts to be fallacies and most of them are adaptations of beliefs common in monolingual settings (see also Cummins, 1989). These fallacies include the following:

1) Oral proficiency precedes literacy learning: We observed a number of children during the course of our research who were writing in their "second language" (English) prior to having oral ability in that language. This questions the common assumption that literacy is always dependent on progress in the spoken language.

2) Reading develops before writing: This sequence may be a result of classroom routines, but we observed children who can write better than they can read in their "second language" (see e. g., Moll & Dworin, 1996). This same pattern may also be found among monolingual learners.

3) The first language must serve as a base for literacy: It was not uncommon to find children who are more proficient speakers in Spanish, but better readers in English. With some assistance, many of these children could use their English reading proficiency to develop their ("first language") Spanish literacy.

4) A fixed sequence for learning is desirable in a second language: This is a very common myth, but as Edelsky and others have observed, there are multiple paths that are possible for becoming bilingual and biliterate and no single sequence is best for all (see Barrera, 1983; Goodman, et al. 1979; Hudelson, 1988; Moll and Dworin, 1996).

There are numerous illustrations of children who did not follow this sequence from our research. Two brief examples include: Daniel, a bilingual second grader, who read in English at least as much as he did in Spanish and wrote almost exclusively in Spanish. Kyla, a predominantly Anglophone third grader, was learning to write in Spanish prior to reading much in Spanish. There are many others (see Dworin, 1996;

Moll & Dworin, 1996; Moll & Dworin, 1993; Moll, et al. 1990a; Whitmore & Crowell, 1994) where children's biliteracy development did not follow the "traditional" sequence.

These demonstrations of multiple paths to biliteracy suggest further research re-examine issues related to primary language development and biliteracy, the concepts of "first " and "second" language, and other aspects of second language acquisition theory and practice to provide a theoretical foundation for a biliterate pedagogy (Dworin, 1996; Moll & Dworin, 1996).

Different lens for minority language students

As stated previously, the study of biliteracy provides us with a different perspective through which we may understand Latina/o students in bilingual settings. Instead of the persistent and common deficit views (that equate lack of knowledge of English with not being "ready" to learn) being operative, Latina/o students are regarded as capable participants who bring crucial intellectual and linguistic resources to their classrooms.

In a number of classrooms grades two through five, we found teachers and students whose use of Spanish and/or English literacy for academic purposes indicated that in those contexts (where Spanish literacy and discourse is accepted as valid and therefore, relatively unmarked) it was often the bilingual students who were more equiped to fully participate in activities than their monolingual English peers.
It is these types of teacher-student and student-to-student relationships that suggest that a biliterate pedagogy creates a more positive view of students, because of its language-as-resource orientation (Ruiz, 1984), and possibly even greater academic expectations by teachers.

Key Supports for Biliteracy in Classrooms

There are several key supports for biliteracy development in classrooms, according to Dworin (1996). They include but are not limited to) the following: 1) Certain positive aspects of the sociolinguistic climate in the county and city in which the schools were situated; 2) Teachers' philosophy of instruction and classroom practices, including use of Spanish within classroom discourses and literacy instruction; 3) Specific characteristics of the students; and 4) The students as resources for collaborative language learning.

Briefly stated, it appears that there must be a sufficiently viable community of Spanish-speakers as part of the broader sociolinguistic environment to support classroom biliteracy. This is the case because there must be a considerable interest in the maintenance and development of Spanish discourse and literacy through community practices, especially those outside of school settings (Moll, et al, 1990a, 1990b). On one level, this might simply mean that there are sufficient numbers of native Spanish-speakers residing in an area to develop and maintain a school's bilingual/biliterate program. On another, it suggests that there must be sufficient social, cultural, and intellectual institutions in place to support activities and interest in Spanish and provide authentic opportunities for Spanish literacy use and development.

The broader sociolinguistic community, (see Jaramillo, 1995 for a sociolinguistic analysis of Tucson) therefore, is a necessary support for the development of biliteracy in the classroom. This is especially the case for monolingual English students and biliteracy, given that their main social contacts with Spanish-speaking children may only be in school settings. In other words, the Spanish-speaking communities in Tucson facilitated both ethnolinguistic student groups in developing biliteracy in the classroom, and

appear to be a necessary pre-condition for dual language and literacy learning, given the ubiquity of English in the broader society.

Teachers' Philosophy and Classroom Practices

Teachers who brought a dynamic, holistic philosophy and practice to their classrooms facilitated biliteracy, according to our studies. They emphasized the active roles of learners in authentic, purposeful activities and their students viewed literacy practices and learning as meaningful and as their own. Because of this approach and the supportive environment that it created, students were encouraged to "take risks" and to develop their biliteracy for authentic purposes. These included a number of activities, from letter writing and bilingual articles to involving parents in sharing in either English or Spanish to reading a story for pleasure with a friend (Dworin, 1996; Moll & Dworin, 1996; Moll, et al, 1990a; Whitmore & Crowell, 1994).

In Kathy L.'s second and third grade bilingual classroom, for example, she facilitated the building of a community in her classroom as an essential part of creating a learning environment (Dworin, 1996). This focus on teaching respect and caring for individuals was central in supporting the social system of instruction, wherein students were encouraged and expected to work collaboratively in almost all activities in their classroom. In addition, Kathy's uses of English and Spanish, both oral and written, in her teaching represented her positive attitudes toward the cultural backgrounds of her students and their families. This was especially the case with her use of Spanish, which was frequently the media of instruction and communication with parents, and her "naturalistic" discourse, which included and encouraged codeswitching from English to

Spanish to English, etc. That is, there was not a distinct separation of languages during much of the school day.

Characteristics of the Students

It apppears that biliteracy development may be enhanced by certain combinations of student characteristics. Another example from Dworin (1996) illustrates this point, although children's interactions in several classrooms in the two other studies support this perspective as well (see e.g., Moll & Dworin, 1996; Moll, et al. 1990a; Whitmore & Crowell, 1994). It was of crucial importance that the majority of the students in the class were native speakers of Spanish (66 per cent or 18 of 27 students). This provided a counterbalance, to some extent, to English and enabled Spanish to become almost an unmarked language in the classroom. This also created a context where "language majority" students were also among the children who demonstrated biliteracy development in the classroom and suggests that a similar ratio may be desirable for "two-way" programs, where the ratio is often an even balance of Spanish monolinguals and English monolinguals in the same classroom.

Another important characteristic was that many of the Spanish speakers were bilingual, which meant that within certain contexts they became the "language brokers" in the classroom--these students translated for both English- and Spanish- "dominant" children. They also assisted with English and Spanish in writing and reading activities, on the playground, etc. In short, the bilingual students were the ones who mediated much of the discourse and written language activities within the classroom, and with only a few exceptions, it was these students who became biliterate.

Perhaps most important for biliteracy development was that the students themselves were resources for their language and literacy learning. The classroom was a place where the children worked in close collaboration with each other during most activities, including reading and writing in a variety of genres. Through oral and written modes, the students assisted each other, mediating their language learning and creating zones of proximal development for their biliteracy development (Vygotsky, 1987). This close collaborative learning was part of the classroom community, where the teacher expected her students to become self-regulating and self-directed learners who could learn to work well with each other. Given these conditions, children learned collaboratively, utilizing literacies in English and Spanish to mediate classroom learning.

Conclusion

In summary, it appears that biliteracy and a biliterate pedagogy offer much in the way of possibilities for both English-Spanish bilingual and English monolingual students; attempting to create classroom conditions where Spanish discourses and literacies are relatively unmarked holds promise for new kinds of learning and literacies. Incorporating a bilingual perspective (Grosjean, 1989) and viewing languages and literacies from more fluid and dynamic theoretical vantage points may yield increases in academic success for all students. Although more research is needed in this area to better understand the complexities of dual language learning, biliteracy development holds promise for initiating and sustaining truly "additive bilingualism" in our schools " (Lambert, 1987; Landry & Allard, 1991).

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